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A Service of Christian Marriage

WITH INTRODUCTION, COMMENTARY, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Supplemental Worship Resources 5

Theology Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

A SERVICE OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

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PREFACE

A Service of Christian Marriage is the fifth in the Supplemental Worship Resources (SWR) series—originally called the Alternate Rituals series—developed and sponsored by the Section on Worship of the Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church.

When The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968, *The Book of Discipline* provided (Par. 1388) that

> the hymnals of The United Methodist Church are the hymnals of The Evangelical United Brethren Church and *The Methodist Hymnal* [later retitled *The Book of Hymns*]; the Ritual of the Church is that contained in the *Book of Ritual* of The Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1959, and *The Book of Worship for Church and Home* of The Methodist Church.

A need quickly became apparent, however, for supplemental worship resources which, while not replacing the official Ritual of the church, would provide alternatives that more fully reflect developments in the contemporary ecumenical church. The General Conference of 1970 authorized the Commission on Worship to begin work in this area, and the General Conferences of 1972 and 1976 authorized the

Board of Discipleship "to develop standards and resources for the conduct of public worship in the churches" (1976 *Book of Discipline,* Par. 1316.2). The resulting series of publications began with the publication of *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper: An Alternate Text 1972* (SWR 1), which was published both in a Text Edition and later (1975) in a Music Edition. Intensive work during the next four years led to the publication in 1976 of *A Service of Baptism, Confirmation, and Renewal: An Alternate Text 1976* (SWR 2), *Word and Table: A Basic Pattern of Sunday Worship for United Methodists* (SWR 3), and *Ritual in a New Day: An Invitation* (SWR 4). In 1973 the process was begun that is now resulting in the publication of this volume and *A Service of Death and Resurrection* (SWR 7). Further publications in this series are in preparation and will appear soon.

A Service of Christian Marriage supplements "The Order for the Service of Marriage" in *The Book of Worship for Church and Home* of the former Methodist Church and "Holy Matrimony" in the *Book of Ritual* of the former Evangelical United Brethren Church. The introductory chapter and commentary in the present volume illumines the use of these official rites as well as the service and additional resources published here. The desire of the Section on Worship is not to discourage the use of older resources but to enlarge the range of choices open to United Methodist ministers and congregations and to contribute to the ecumenical dialogue now taking place concerning Christian marriage.

This volume, like the other publications in this series, represents the corporate work of the task force which produced the manuscript, and of the Section on Worship, acting as an editorial committee, which determined the original specifications and carefully

examined and edited the manuscript before approving it for publication. The Rev. Robert E. Scoggin, Minister of Music at the Christ United Methodist Church in Rochester, Minnesota, chaired the task force which produced the manuscript. The Rev. Dr. M. Lawrence Snow, Pastor of the Community United Methodist Church in Poughkeepsie, New York, was the principal writer. The Rev. Sharon Neufer Emswiler and the Rev. Thomas Neufer Emswiler assisted in the writing of portions of this manuscript. Other members of this task force were the Rev. Dr. L. L. Haynes, Jr., Pastor of Wesley United Methodist Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; the Rev. Douglass J. McKee, Associate Pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Cheyenne, Wyoming; and the Rev. Dr. Hoyt L. Hickman of the Section on Worship staff. The Rev. Thom C. Jones and the Rev. Dr. Carlton R. Young assisted in the preparation of musical suggestions. Dr. Ekkehard Muehlenberg of Claremont School of Theology rendered knowledgeable assistance. General manucript preparation was done by Hoyt L. Hickman and Everland Robinson in the office of the Section on Worship.

During the deliberations of both the task force and the Section on Worship, there were many points at which there were differences of opinion and conviction not easily reconciled, particularly with respect to alleged sexism in language and wedding customs. It has been the policy of the Section ever since the 1972 General Conference not to use masculine words to refer to people in general; but the use of masculine words such as "Father," "he," and "Lord" for God raised profound and complex issues on which it has proved impossible to reach unanimity. As a result of this and other differences, it should be understood that this volume is a compromise about which some

of the individuals involved in its preparation have serious personal reservations but which represents the best that can be done corporately at this time.

The members and staff of the Section on Worship, listed below, wish to thank the many persons who have shared with us their thoughts and their wedding services and to invite all those who create or discover anything they think may be of wider interest to send such materials to the Section on Worship, PO Box 840, Nashville, Tennessee 37202. These have greatly helped us in the preparation of this volume and will make possible improved services in the years to come. We commend this volume to the use of local churches with the hope that it will be useful in the worship of God and the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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I. A BASIC PATTERN OF WORSHIP FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

A. GATHERING
1. Entrance
2. Greeting
3. Declaration of Intention
4. Response of Families of People

B. MINISTRY OF THE WORD
5. Prayer
6. Scripture and Praise
7. Homily or Sermon
8. Intercession

C. THE MARRIAGE
9. Exchange of Vows
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11. Declaration of Marriage
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D. THANKSGIVING: THREE OPTIONS
13a. Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer
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II. AN INTRODUCTION

A new Service of Marriage for United Methodists basically results from a renewed and reformed understanding of worship. This renewal arises from an ongoing appraisal of the Scriptures, the traditions of the universal church, the practices of our own denomination, and the manifold claims of our modern times.

Each of these roots of renewal in worship, taken separately and together, confirms that something more profound and substantial is required than revising the text or modernizing the language of the current Order for the Service of Marriage.[1]

Traditional as it may seem in text and theology, the present United Methodist "Order for the Service of Marriage" is not a full service of worship itself. It does not indicate in the rubrics how it might be ordered and celebrated as such. Our present service reflects its medieval origins as an ecclesiastical solemnization of the marriage contract. The essence of our familiar marriage vows (". . . to have and to hold, from this day forward . . .") conveys the ancient sense of a legal contract freely consented to before witnesses.

The opening address in the Service of Marriage still contains the remnant of a bann, which was originally to be read or published on three Sundays previous to the date of the marriage. With the absence of a full service of worship, betrothal and nuptial vows sound like legal requirements for a contract. The prayers and religious language in the other parts of the current service tend to become a mixture of invocations and moral injunctions rather than ordered elements in an act of worship.

During John Wesley's lifetime, it was illegal for persons to be married in any other church or chapel except those of the established Church of England.[2] For this reason, and because Wesley was a priest who loved the *Book of Common Prayer*, he adopted its rite of marriage when he prepared his 1784 service book for American Methodists. He deleted the ring ceremony, perhaps because of scruples about wearing ornaments and jewels. He also omitted the act of giving the woman in marriage. American Methodists later made other changes, such as omitting the betrothal vows. Nonetheless, the basic structure and text of our service still is very similar to Cranmer's 1549 edition of "The Forme of Solemnizacion of Matrimonie" in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Much of Cranmer's work was based on the Latin use of Sarum (Salisbury). The lovely wedding vows predate the Reformation by more than a century and were said by the couple in English long before the rest of the rite was translated from Latin.

In recent years, there has been a growing conviction that the solemnization of marriage should be a full public service of worship. This can be seen in the changes of the title and location of this rite in "The Ritual" during the past two hundred years. After Wesley's 1784 abridgement for *The Sunday*

Service of the Methodists in North America, the marriage rite was placed in "The Ritual" at the back of *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* from 1792 onward. It was still entitled "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony." During the nineteenth century, it was often grouped with the occasional services, and the "form" became the "order" for the solemnization. Most recently, it has been included in the "General Services of the Church"; and its archaic title, though not the text, changed to "The Order for the Service of Marriage."

All the major traditions and churches have revised or written new marriage services in recent years. These have been carefully studied, and this new *Service of Christian Marriage* is indebted to this work in the universal church. The underlying reason for a new United Methodist rite is the same as that for other churches. "We seek to give liturgical expression to a view of Christian marriage and of the relationship between the sexes which incorporates modern insights and which differs . . . from that of earlier periods."[3]

The institution of marriage is based on the order of creation. The earliest prayer book preface refers to "holy matrimony (as) an honorable estate instituted of God in paradise."[4] "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27 RSV). Jesus recalled this created equality in his teaching on divorce: "But from the beginning of the creation, 'God made them male and female' " (Mark 10:6 RSV).

The equality of male and female is clearly stated in such passages as St. Paul's declaration: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is

neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-28 RSV). This understanding of the equality of the sexes governs our reading of those passages of Scripture which seemingly or actually reflect a culturally conditioned patriarchal view.

Christian marriage is a sign of a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman. They fulfill each other, and their love gives birth to new life *in* each and *through* each. This union of love is possible because Christ is the bond of unity. He is this bond of unity when both their lives are centered in him. Paul writes the Ephesians: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21 RSV). Paul's whole discussion makes sense only in the light of that basic and mutual bond between spouses *and* Christ.

The Christian marriage confirms this grace-filled *equality* of female and male in Christ. When a man and a woman are baptized into Christ, they also discover their *uniqueness* and *community* in his body, the church. The marriage of a baptized couple is a covenant between equals that celebrates their unity in Jesus Christ. They make a little family within the household of God; a "little church" in the Body of Christ.

The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century were unwilling to call marriage a sacrament because they did not regard matrimony as a *necessary* means of grace for salvation. Though not necessary to salvation, certainly marriage is a means of grace, thus sacramental in character. It is a covenant grounded in the reality of God's love. A Christian marriage is both a plea for, and an expression of, daily graces. The married couple's way of life is to be a sign of what the church ought to be: a community of God's love. Their fidelity is the strongest indication we have that the

Christian life is possible in our world.[5] St. Paul contended that marriage between a Christian and non-Christian is also a holy union and a means for conversion (I Corinthians 7:14*a*).

The classic purposes of Christian marriage require continuing evaluation and interpretation. These purposes, traditionally ranked, were to bear children, to avoid sin, and to enable companionship. Both the priority and content of these purposes have been widely criticized.[6]

The view that marriage's prime purpose is procreation is theologically and practically arguable. This purpose needs to be understood, not as a universal claim of so-called natural law, but as a decision of conscience made in marital trust and based on grace. Such a decision may or may not result in a commitment to bear children. A Christian family may complete its love with no children, through adopting or fostering children, or by planning for natural issue.

Marriage as an expedient to avoid sin presumes a narrow view of human sexuality. It also accents a negative view of the completed sexual relationship. Behind these views is a long history which contends that all sexual union is sinful, whether in the bond of marriage or not. Rather, sexual union is an expression of intimacy and love; and it is a chief means of grace and self-giving love in the marriage covenant. Sexuality is a gift of God to be accepted and enjoyed in the marriage relationship.

The third basic purpose of marriage is to establish a home, or as an old prayer book described it, "a mutual society." The Christian community of the family is more than a private friendship; it is a relationship in and of the church as household of God. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council rightly

referred to the family as a "domestic church."[7] Therefore, the purpose of Christian marriage is not only to fulfill the needs of domestic intimacy, but also to enable the family to accept duties and responsibilities in the Christian community for society at large. The church witnesses to God's justice and love in both private and public life. Christian families are members of the church and citizens of the state. To paraphrase our Puritan forebears: a family is a little church, and a little commonwealth; it is a school in which persons are fitted to greater matters in church and society.[8]

The service of marriage should celebrate the all-embracing good news of God's grace. Christian marriage is a covenant of grace undergirding the state's civil contract. Promises and demands in services for Christian marriage are something more than, and different from, the claims of the legal contract that marriage is in the eyes of the state. These Christian promises and demands go beyond the law. They are unconditional expectations of the couple, given in the public vows, exhorted in Scripture and sermon, and enabled by the unswerving promises of God's unconditional mercy and love through which the two gain oneness.

Christian marriage has been influenced for hundreds of years by civil prescriptions and cultural habits. In the earliest generations of the Christian era, the churches recognized civil contracts between baptized members, and for several more centuries, the clergy served as literate witnesses in home weddings, and later at the porch of the church.

The following pre-Christian influences linger in the wedding: the betrothal vow; giving the woman in marriage; groomsmen and bridesmaids; joining right hands; the use of rings; and signed contracts. The

tradition that June is a favorite season for weddings goes back to pagan Rome and Greece. Costumes and veils, rice (a symbol of fertility), carrying the bride over the threshold, marital festivities, and honeymoons all have pagan roots.[9]

Like the celebration of Christmas, the celebration of Christian marriage can often be a delightful amalgam of profane custom and sacred rite. A purist response toward the cultural impact upon Christian marriage would be unrealistic. The Christian marriage is a wedding of the earthy and the spiritual. Frequently, an actual service will evidence a mixture of the solemn and the silly, pomp and sentiment, earthiness and grace.

United Methodists pride themselves on being a nationally, racially, and culturally inclusive church. This means that local customs and ethnic traditions are desirable as well as unavoidable. However, the church must continue to be discriminating about these influences. Marriage is an incarnational event. We celebrate a Christ who is *against* culture, *of* culture, *above* culture, *in paradoxical relationship with* culture, and *transforming* culture.[10]

The church's care for the institutions of marriage and the family is eminently pastoral. This pastoral interest in marriage is more extensive than counseling to prepare a couple for marriage; to rehearse them for the rite; to rescue them in difficulty; and to extend grace for the divorced or widowed who seek remarriage. The particular pastoral opportunities surrounding the rite of marriage are part and parcel of the church's encompassing care for families from birth to death.

Because marriage, like baptism and confirmation, is a rite of passage, people often regard the service as something the church and clergy do *to* them or *for*

them. In fact, the couple marry themselves to each other in the presence of God and a company of people. "It is the unvarying teaching of Christendom that the essence of marriage is consent. The core of all Christian marriage rites is, therefore, the point at which the two parties declare their consent to one another (and the same is true of the civil marriage rite). Thus the couple effect their own marriage by consenting to each other."[11]

The minister is the church's official representative and witness and presides at the service and at Holy Communion (when celebrated), announces the consent, and pronounces the blessing. The family and congregation are also witnesses and a community of faith. They affirm, give thanks, and welcome the new family within the household of faith.

The pastor enables the couple to understand both the joys and responsibilities of marriage. The pastor also uses premarital conferences to discover the couple's story, life-style, and religious experience and commitment. Careful listening will enable the pastor to discuss practical options for the service and to witness God's grace for their married life. The concern is to celebrate both the church's faith and the participants' hope and love. The pastor has a preeminent role as Christian teacher.

Many who ask for a marriage service at the church or from a minister are token believers in the Christian faith. Premarriage conferences and the rehearsal should accent the gospel, and correct the impression that weddings are a theatrical ceremony. This instruction should be given to those who are being married for the first time, those who have had a civil ceremony and seek a church blessing, and the widowed and the divorced who want to be married again.

When couples come from different religious traditions, the minister should advise them on ecumenical courtesies and possibilities. If, for example, a Roman Catholic priest will share in the service, he should be invited to take part in the premarital discussions and plans. In the service itself, the ministers should share equally in the ritual. This kind of pastoral cooperation makes an important Christian witness to the families—for example, about our baptismal unity in Christ.

There is much about a marriage service which encourages congregational participation. Whether singing hymns, reading Scriptures, responding to the vows, giving the peace or sharing in Communion or an agapé meal, those who plan the service should seek full involvement of all present.

The use of music, instrumental or vocal, expresses the joy of the event. Congregational singing is most desirable. The organist or person in charge of the music needs to be consulted in all decisions on music selection (see chapter 8).

The Sacrament of Holy Communion may be celebrated, but care should be given to avoid a "private Communion," which excludes the congregation. At the same time, the elements should be administered so that those who choose not to receive need not be embarrassed. If Holy Communion is not chosen, a growing number of ministers and couples find that an agapé meal (love feast) is a joyful conclusion to the marriage service.

In sum, the Christian marriage rite is a particular form of celebrating God's good news. Specific provision may be made for a blessing of a civil marriage. However, *A Service of Christian Marriage* is not a religious service added to the state's prescribed legal contract.

Established by God in Scripture, Christian marriage is a lifelong covenant relationship of a man and a woman. "Covenant," in contrast to contract, involves giving of self unreservedly in love to the other."[12] This union of love is possible when Jesus Christ is the basis and bond of unity. Christ becomes that bond of unity when the couple are centered on him. The couple encounters the risen Lord daily in their love for each other.

In the community of believers, the people's witness is not just as observers. They all share in the ministry of the Word, the couple's exchange of vows, and the blessing.

Elaborate or simple, the Christian marriage event is an act of serving God and proclaiming the lordship of Jesus Christ for the new family in the household of faith.

III. A COMMENTARY

PREFACE

The commentary is intended for ministers, musicians, as well as couples seeking Christian marriage. It can be used in discussions at premarriage conferences, and it certainly should be read before wedding rehearsals when *A Service of Christian Marriage* is being followed.

The purpose of the commentary is to clarify the text of the service and its liturgical opportunities. The service itself is designed (1) to be used as it is printed, or (2) to be adapted with alternative texts (see chapter 4), or (3) to provide a pattern and suggestions for preparing one's own marriage rite.

More than any other act of public worship, the marriage rite invites the personal choices of its participants. The commentary and *A Service of Christian Marriage* propose choices and variables. The commentary offers a list of hymns and Scriptures appropriate for a celebration of Christian marriage.

At the same time, care must be taken because Christian marriage is also a legal act subject to civil law. The minister is responsible to the laws of the state in which the marriage is performed. Further, a

service of marriage is a public act of worship, no matter what the setting, how few the participants, or how "private" the invitation to it. The personal and unique character of each service of marriage needs to be expressed in and through the structures of corporate worship.

Since this is explicitly a service of Christian Marriage, it presupposes that one or both of the parties is Christian (see I Corinthians 7:12-14). Its Christian intention is professed by the faith of one or both of the parties and recognized by both in consenting to the union.

A. GATHERING

After all preliminaries have been satisfied, including the laws of the state and the *Discipline* of The United Methodist Church, the wedding party, family and friends will assemble at the church or other appropriate location.[13] It is, of course, most appropriate for weddings to be held in the church where the community of the faithful regularly gathers for worship.

If music and hymns are used, their selection should be made in consultation with the organist or person in charge of the music for the service. Congregational singing should be encouraged. The keynotes are joy, praise, and thanksgiving.

For maximum participation, a printed order of service may be provided to the worshipers. The service leaflet inserted in this book may be purchased in bulk and distributed to the whole congregation.

As the people assemble, vocal or instrumental music, or possibly liturgical dance, may be offered. Liturgical banners and other art forms may be displayed for the gathering or carried in a procession. Local church policy and customs for use of candles,

flowers, and other decorations should be followed. The lighting of candles before the entrance, and extinguishing or carrying them out after the dismissal with blessing can be appropriate.

1. Entrance

The man and woman, their witnesses, families, and members of the wedding party will enter the church or place of assembly as previously planned. In some congregations it is customary for the bride and groom to stand together at the door and greet worshipers gathering before the service.

The bride and groom may enter separately or together, with their parents or members of their families. There may be a formal procession with instrumental music or congregational singing. They may enter silently and take positions visible to the assembly. The minister(s) may join in the entrance or procession, or take a position in the congregation to meet the wedding party.

It should be borne in mind that the way in which the couple enter can be a powerful statement in itself of the relationship of the man and the woman. Entering together or moving simultaneously toward each other indicates equality. To some, for the woman to come to the man seems to suggest subordination of the woman.

Suggested Hymns

	Book of Hymns
Come, Thou Almighty King	3
Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above	4
Come, Ye that Love the Lord	5
Praise the Lord Who Reigns Above	15
O God, Our Help in Ages Past	28
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee	38
Now Thank We All Our God	49

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty	55
Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven	66
The King of Love My Shepherd Is	67
All Praise to Thee, for Thou, O King Divine	74
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling	283
Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts	329
O Perfect Love	333
May the Grace of Christ Our Savior	334
Come Down, O Love Divine	466

2. Greeting

A Service of Christian Marriage continues with a greeting[14] which welcomes the people and explains the purpose of the gathering. The greeting may be given by the minister or a lay person who may be a member of the wedding party. It may be done informally or extemporaneously, and may include introductions of the participants.

If the service is being conducted informally the congregation may exchange greetings and be explicitly invited to participate.

An invocation may be offered before or after the greeting.

The greeting may be in the form of a spoken or sung call to worship. In any event, the greeting should acknowledge that we have gathered in the sight and name of the Lord.

If the gathering has not involved a processional hymn, a hymn of praise may be sung following the greeting.

3. Declaration of Intention

The woman and man state early in the service why they are present, hence their free and mutual consent to be married.[15] Traditionally, this declaration is equivalent to the public betrothal. It should not be

confused with or substitute for the actual wedding vows which come later in the service.

Christian marriage between a man and a woman is not a private matter. It presumes responsibility both to civil society and to the Christian community. It is a legal contract freely entered into before witnesses. The couple announce in the congregation their intent to commit themselves unreservedly in the bond of marriage. "It is not a formula but the promise of fidelity that makes a marriage."[16] Therefore, traditional formulas of intent or new ones, perhaps written by the couple, may be used. The declaration should express without qualification or reservation the intention of lifelong fidelity and an acknowledgment of responsible family life.

No matter what the role of the minister—asking the question or prompting the lines—it is the couple who give their consent publicly affirming their mutual intention. They should use their Christian or first names.

4. Response of Families or Congregations

The declaration of intention calls for a response from the parents or congregaton. In *A Service of Christian Marriage,* options for both sorts of responses are provided. The verbal response may be accompanied by embraces or other signs of affection and support from the families and participants.

It may be the prevailing custom or personal preference that the father of the bride escort her into the service and give her hand into the hand of the groom. In premarital conferences the minister should point out that the woman is not the property of her parents to be given away and that the parents and families of both parties may wish to respond to the declaration of intention. Whatever gestures are used here should apply equally to both the woman

and the man. If there are children of the couple by previous marriage(s), it is fitting for them to join in this affirmation of support and blessing.[17]

Traditionally, giving a daughter or woman's hand in marriage was a literal gesture consummating common law agreement about dowry and property. The father of the bride gave her hand over to the groom. This handclasp transaction not only legally conveyed property but treated the woman as means in the process. She was property, and subordinate to the man. These specific legal connotations and obligations have become obsolete in the modern rite of Christian marriage. Therefore, after the declaration of intent, the wedding couple and their families may want to offer and to receive gestures of support and response that more appropriately, even spontaneously, express their shared affection and goodwill. These gestures could include mutual handclasps, embraces, kisses, and applause from the congregation.

In any case, a Christian marriage occurs within a community of believers, God's family of the faithful, and it is most appropriate for the congregation to express its support. In some settings, this response may lead to a hymn or act of praise.

B. MINISTRY OF THE WORD

A central act in all public worship is to make the Word of God present to the people. In *A Service of Christian Marriage,* it is a ministry of prayer, praise, Scripture, and congregational response. The various parts of this section may be led, not only by the minister(s), but by the members of the wedding party, including groom and bride, and by other participants from the congregation.

5. Prayer

This prayer acknowledges God as creating, redeeming, sustaining, and sanctifying. It begins and ends in praise, accenting the marriage covenant. Other themes for this prayer might be invocation, confession and pardon, and request for illumination from the Scriptures. The latter may be said just before the Scripture reading(s). Recognition of who the people and couple are in the presence of God, and petition for grace are especially appropriate for this prayer.

A call to confession, prayers of confession, and words of forgiveness may also be said in connection with the intercessions.

6. Scripture and Praise

If there is more than one Scripture reading, a hymn, psalm, canticle, or anthem may be said or sung between the readings. They should accent God's love and fidelity, the people's joy and thanksgiving. Again, the organist or music director should be consulted in the selection of music.

Integral to the Christian marriage rite is the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. The man and woman should consult with the minister(s) in selecting appropriate scriptural readings. Such readings and the responses to them by the congregation may be said or sung. An affirmation of faith (creed) may be declared by the people, either after the readings or, preferably, after the sermon.[18]

A Selection of Scripture Readings

Psalms	23	34
	33 (sel.)	37

A Selection of Scripture Readings (cont.)

67
103 (sel.)
112
121
127
128
145 (sel.)
148 (sel.)

Old Testament

Genesis 1:26-31
2:18-25

Song of Solomon 1:15-16*a*; 2:2-3*a*,8-14,16*a*
4:1*a*,9-10; 5:10,15*b*-16; 6:3*a*; 8:6-7

Isaiah 54:5-8

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Hosea 2:16-23

New Testament

Matthew 5:1-10, 13-16
7:21, 24-29
19:3-6
22:35-40

Mark 10:6-9, 13-16

John 2:1-11
15:9-16

Romans 12:1-2, 9-18

I Corinthians 12:31–13:8*a*

I Corinthians 13
6:15-20

Ephesians 3:14-21
5:2*a*, 21-33

Colossians 3:12-17

I Peter 3:1-9

I John 3:18-24
4:7-16

Revelation 19:1, 5-9*a*

Apocrypha

Tobit 8:5-10

Suggested Readings for Agapé Meal

John 4:13-14
6:33
12:26
14:23
15:5, 9, 12

Romans 8:37-39
12:1-2, 9-13
15:7

II Corinthians 9:10-11

I Thessalonians 4:9

I John 3:1*a*
4:7, 13-14

7. Homily or Sermon

The purpose of a homily or sermon is to proclaim to the couple and congregation the significance of the Christian message of God's fidelity and what it means for the event of love and the beginning of a new way of life together. The sermon can proclaim the promise God gives to the union and God's act in making our union possible. The proclamation might be choral or visual, or be a liturgical dance (which could be simultaneous with the readings). The two charges at the beginning of the traditional service may be read as a homily.[19]

8. Intercession

This prayer intercedes for the well-being of the human family, the church, and the present marriage. It prays for a fresh vision of marriage as the man and woman prepare to exchange marriage vows. A series of responsive petitions can be offered when the prayer is printed in a program. Another possibility is an intercessory pastoral prayer.

C. THE MARRIAGE

The marriage involves the public proclamation and acknowledgment of the couple's commitment. The central moment in the marriage rite occurs when the

couple promise themselves to each other for life. In this marriage covenant, the couple are the principal ministers, but the pastor and congregation also assist as necessary witnesses and supporters.

9. Exchange of Vows

The exchange of marriage promises by the man and woman is their response to the gift of God's proclaimed promise, the good news of grace and love for them contained in Scripture. Again, traditional or original vows may be said. They should be phrased in unconditional terms which express lifelong covenant. Christian or first names should be used.

Since this is the central act of the service of marriage, its visual impact as well as its verbal content is of great importance. The couple should be clearly visible to the congregation and the minister(s). Since the vows are spoken to one another and not to the minister(s) or congregation, the couple should face each other and take each other by the hand when exchanging their promises.

The minister is an official witness of the Christian community and the state; however, in the Western tradition, the whole congregation share in the ministry of the service. The couple marry each other in the presence of God and the Christian community.

The phrase "until we are parted by death" does not deny the reality of a reunion after death but means that the surviving partner is free to remarry.

10. Blessing and Giving Rings

We do not invoke God's blessing upon inanimate objects in themselves, but upon their use. If rings or other visible signs of love and mutual commitment are exchanged, it is appropriate for the minister to offer a prayer or to express the intention that these signs will be effective reminders of all of the couple's commitment.

The gift or exchange of tangible symbols, such as rings, is customary, but optional, in the marriage rite. The marriage is not effected by the giving and receiving of the ring(s). The ring or other tangible symbol is a token and pledge of the covenant the couple has already made in their exchange of the wedding vows. This act of exchanging the rings is an "outward sign of an inward grace" because the deed expresses the mutual love and trust of the couple in God and each other. In some cultures other gifts are given. In the Hispanic tradition, it is customary for the groom to give the "arras" (coins) to the bride in addition to the ring. The spoken pledge in *A Service of Christian Marriage* confirms that the giver is making a total and absolute commitment.

11. Declaration of Marriage

After the couple's commitment the minister announces, *not* pronounces, that they are now husband and wife. In the Hispanic tradition the witnesses *(padrinos)* will place the *lazo* (cord) over the bride and groom to symbolize their union.

Our society is becoming increasingly self-conscious about the significance of naming and surnames. The Scriptures have much to say about the power and identity that resides in giving and invoking names. The linking of the names of the Trinity with the names of the newly wedded couple is a powerful Christian witness, as it also is in the sacrament of Baptism. Those who are interested in naming, renaming, and the practical implication of choosing surnames in marriage, can consult "Naming" in *Ritual in a New Day.*[20]

12. Response of Wedding Party and Congregation

The people may respond with an amen, a hymn, or a doxology. One way to respond to the declaration is for the license certificate and registry to be signed at

this time in the service, perhaps during the singing of a hymn.

D. THANKSGIVING: THREE OPTIONS

Now that the couple has married, it is most fitting in the Christian context that the married couple and the congregation join together in an act of thanksgiving. This may take one of three forms.

13a. Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer

The theme is thanksgiving to God for who God is and what God does. The prayer may be fittingly expanded to express thanks for particular persons, families, graces, and resources. The basic text may be printed in the bulletin so the congregation may pray it. Litany forms may be employed. If the minister prays this prayer extemporaneously, care should be taken not to use this prayer as an indirect way of preaching at the couple, as is the case in several traditional marriage rites ("that they may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant between them made").[21]

13b. Holy Communion

Holy Communion may be celebrated when sharing by the congregation is possible. An invitation should be given to all who wish to receive, as distinct from restricting Communion to the wedding couple and party. *A Service of Christian Marriage* is a public and corporate act of worship; therefore, the Communion should not be treated as a private ceremony.

The parts of the Communion Service include:

Taking the Bread and the Cup
The Great Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer
Breaking the Bread
Giving the Bread and Cup

For detailed suggestions concerning the giving of the bread and the cup, see *Word and Table,* pp. 39-41.

13c. Agapé Meal (Love Feast)

The agapé meal dates from New Testament times and is cited in I Corinthians and Jude. Because of abuses, the agapé meal fell into disuse in the Western church. It was revived in the eighteenth century by Moravians, Brethren, and Methodists and has become a common act of community in most traditions of the twentieth-century church.

It is particularly fitting for weddings and provides an opportunity for corporate sharing when some members of a congregation might not wish to receive Communion.

So that there be no confusion, it is preferable to use different elements from those in Communion; for example, buns or rolls and fruit juice or water.

The parts of an agapé meal are brief and may be largely extemporaneous. The minister may quote a few words of Scripture (see suggested Scriptures listed earlier in this commentary). One or two members of the wedding party, including the couple, may say a few words expressing their joy and feelings about the event. An extemporaneous prayer may be offered, and the elements are distributed. The newly married couple may aid in distributing to the wedding party and their families. The people may sing a hymn or two during this sharing.

Discussion of the agapé may be done at the premarriage conference and wedding rehearsal. If there is a bulletin, a brief explanatory word can be included. The agapé may come at the beginning of the wedding reception and provide a natural transition into the banquet or meal.

Historically, the agapé includes an "offering for the poor," which may be treated as a freewill

offering, and which a Christian couple might make their benevolent deed at the festivities in the midst of a poor and hungry world. The symbolism of the agapé bread and water suggests penance and fasting as well as the water of our common baptism in Christ.[22]

E. DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING

14. Dismissal with Blessing and the Peace

The dismissal with blessing is commonly called a benediction.

The blessing may include the elements of the Jewish *berakah:* (a) addressing God in joyous admiration, (b) calling to mind what God has done to prompt this exclamation, (c) petitioning for God's continued favors, and (d) concluding with a doxology.

The peace commonly begins with the kiss and embrace of the husband and wife. Those present may also exchange greetings with one another in whatever manner is customary or appropriate. The giving of the peace may occur earlier in the service, such as before Holy Communion when it is celebrated.

The instrumental music and congregational singing at the close should be triumphant and joyful. During or after the hymn or other music (or in silence), the newly married couple, wedding party, families, and congregation may leave.

AFTER THE SERVICE

After the service is ended, the state license, church certificate, and registry should be witnessed and signed, unless this requirement was satisfied *in* the service, for example, after the declaration of marriage (11). In ecumenical marriages, cross-registering between parishes is desirable. Other courtesies, such

as the greeting of guests by the wedding party and taking photographs, can be arranged.

If the reception, wedding meal, or picnic is at the church or on the adjacent grounds, a joyful procession might add to the festivities.

IV. ALTERNATE TEXTS

1. *Greetings and Charges*

Dear families and friends, this is a day for celebration and thanksgiving. We are gathered to witness the marriage of *(name)* and *(name)*. They have invited us to share in their public declaration of lifelong commitment to each other. We stand in the presence of God and ask for divine blessing on this solemn and joyful occasion.

The following may also be used as a charge in the place of a sermon or homily.

We have come together in the presence of God to witness the marriage of *(name)* and *(name)* and to rejoice with them. Let us then consider the holy mystery into which they are entering.

Marriage is a gift of God and a means of his grace, in which man and woman become one flesh. It is God's purpose that, as husband and wife give themselves to each other in love, they shall grow together and be united in that love as Christ is united with his church.

Marriage is given that husband and wife

may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together; that they may know each other with delight and tenderness in acts of love [and that they may be blessed in the procreation, care, and upbringing of children].

In marriage husband and wife belong to each other, they are linked to each other's families, and they begin a new life together in the community. It is a way of life that all should reverence, and none should lightly undertake.

(Name) and *(name)* have now come to enter this holy state. They will give their consent each to the other; they will exchange solemn vows, and in token of this they will give and receive a ring [rings].

On their wedding day we pray with them that by God's help they may fulfill his purpose for the whole of their earthly life together.[23]

or

Dear Friends, we have come together in the presence of God to witness and proclaim the joining together of this man and this woman in marriage. The bond of marriage was established by God at creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. This bond signifies to us the union between Christ and his church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people.

The union of man and woman in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of

children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accord with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.[24]

2. *Declaration of Intention*

(Name), will you take *(name)* to be your husband?

Will you freely share all that you have and all that you are with him for the rest of your life?

I will.

(Name), will you take *(name)* to be your wife?

Will you freely share all that you have and all that you are with her for the rest of your life?

I will.

3. *Response of Families and Children*

Either after the declaration of intention (3) or after the declaration of marriage (11), children and marrying parents may share verbal and ritual expressions of support and other gestures of love such as lighting candles or giving tokens and signs of affection.

We thank God for your love which gives (makes) us a new family. We rejoice that your marriage blesses us with new bonds of trust and ties of affection. We pledge ourselves and our love to you.

4. *Vows*

I, *(name)*, give myself in marriage to you, *(name)*, with all my love as long as we both shall live.

or

I, *(name)*, promise by God's grace to be your faithful husband (wife), and to love you as

Christ commands as long as we both shall live.

or

I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, *(name)*, do take you, *(name)*, to be my lawful husband (wife), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy law; and to this I pledge myself.[25]

or

I take you, *(name)*, to be my wife (husband), and I promise before God and all who are present here to be your loving and faithful husband (wife) as long as our lives shall last. I will serve you with tenderness and respect, and encourage you to develop God's gifts in you.[26]

or

(Name), I take you to be my husband (wife)
from this time onward, to join with you and
to share all that is
to come,
to give and to receive,
to speak and to listen,
to inspire and to respond,
and in all our life together
to be loyal to you.
with all my being, my whole life long.[27]

or

(Name), to you, I offer my life; I offer my body;
I offer my strength; I offer my support;

I offer my loyalty; I offer my faith;
I offer my hope; I offer my love
in all the changing circumstances of life, as long as we both shall live.[28]

5. *Declaration of Marriage*

Minister: *(Name)* and *(name)*, by your promises you have declared yourselves husband and wife. On behalf of all gathered here I pray God's blessing on your marriage. Let us witness and sign your covenant together.

Here may the wedding certificate, marriage license, and church registry be properly signed, witnessed, and sealed.

Presiding
Minister: *(Name)* and *(name)*, by their promises before God and in the presence of this congregation, have made themselves husband and wife. Blessed be the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit now and for ever.

Assisting
Minister: *(Name)* and *(name)* have been joined by the love of Almighty God in the life of the Spirit of Christ, and no one must divide them.

All: Blessed be the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit now and for ever.[29]

6. *Prayers*

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation, and giver of all grace: Look with favor upon the world you have made, and for which your Son gave his life, and especially upon this man and this woman whom you make one flesh in Holy Matrimony. **Amen.**[30]

Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. **Amen.**[30]

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and one another all the days of their life. **Amen.**[30]

Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours. **Amen.**[30]

Make their life together a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair. **Amen.**[30]

Bestow on them, if it is your will, the gift and heritage of children, and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you. **Amen.**[30]

Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out in love and concern for others. **Amen.**[30]

Grant that all married persons who have witnessed these vows may find their lives strengthened and their loyalties confirmed. **Amen.**[30]

Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, O Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity, now and for ever. **Amen.**[30]

Faithful God, we thank you for confirming the union of *(name)* and *(name)* in the bond of marriage. From your store of strength, give them power and patience, affection and understanding, courage and love toward you, toward each other, and toward the world. **Amen.**[30]

Loving God, we thank you for all families, and especially for those who stand with this couple as they establish a new home. By your Holy Spirit continue to transform their lives, day by day, so that they may grow in the grace and love of your Son and our Savior Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send therefore your blessing upon these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and

peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**[30]

Eternal God, without your grace no promise is sure. Strengthen *(name)* and *(name)* with the gift of your Spirit so they may fulfill the vows they have taken. Keep them faithful to each other and to you. Fill them with such love and joy that they may build a home where no one is a stranger. And guide them by your word to serve you all the days of their lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom be honor and glory forever and ever. **Amen.**[31]

Holy Father, creator of the universe, maker of man and woman in your own likeness, source of blessing for married life, we pray for *(name)* and *(name)*, united in the covenant of marriage. May your fullest blessing come upon them so that they may together rejoice in your gift of married love [and enrich the household of faith with their children]. Lord, may they both praise you when they are happy and turn to you in their sorrows. May they be glad that you help them in their work and know that you are with them in their need. May they pray to you in the community of the Church, and be your witnesses in the world. May they reach old age in the company of their friends, and come at last to the kingdom of heaven. [We ask this] through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**[32]

7. *The Great Thanksgiving at Holy Communion*
An alternative to the Great Thanksgiving in the service, to be used when the congregation cannot participate in the prayer.

Lift up your hearts and give thanks to the Lord our God.

Blessed are you, Lord our God,
Creator and Sovereign of the universe.
You made us in your image, male and female
you created us.
You gave us the gift of marriage, which
embodies your love,
that we might fulfill one another.
Best of all, you loved the world so much
you gave your only Son Jesus Christ to be
our Savior.
He won for you a new people to be his
family
and gave us in his sacrificial love
the example for the love of husband and
wife.
He suffered and died for the sin of the
world.
You raised him from the dead
that we, too, might have new life.
He ascended to be with you in glory
and by the power of your Holy Spirit is
with us always.

On the night he offered himself up for us
he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke it,
gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for
you.
Do this in remembrance of me."
When supper was over,
he took the cup, gave thanks to you,
gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Drink from this, all of you;

this cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood,
poured out for you and many, for the forgiveness of sins.
Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me."

Therefore,
in remembrance of all your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we ask you to accept
this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving,
which we offer in union with Christ's offering for us, as a living and holy surrender of ourselves.

Send the power of your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts.
May the sharing of this bread and wine
be for us a sharing in the body and blood of Christ.
Pour out the abundance of your blessing.
upon *(name)* and *(name)*.
May their love for one another
reflect the love of Christ for us.
Make them one flesh
and all of us one body in Christ, cleansed by his blood,
that we may faithfully serve him in the world.

Through him, with him, and in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

V. A SERVICE FOR THE RECOGNITION OF A MARRIAGE or THE BLESSING OF A CIVIL MARRIAGE

The service[33] *may follow the order for* A Service of Christian Marriage *through the Gathering and Ministry of Word.*

An alternative greeting may be:

(Name) and *(name)* have been married by the law of the state, and they have made a solemn contract with each other. Now, in faith, they come before the witness of the church to declare their marriage covenant and to acknowledge God's good news for their lives.

After the Scriptures (and sermon), the minister may say:

(Name) and *(name)*, you have come here today to seek the blessing of God and of the church upon your marriage.

To the husband:

(Name), you have taken *(name)* to be your wife. Do you promise to love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, to be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

I do.

To the wife:

(Name), you have taken *(name)* to be your husband. Do you promise to love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, to be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

I do.

or

To the husband:

(Name), you have taken this woman to be your lawful wife. Since you wish to declare before God your desire that your married life should be according to God's will, I ask you, therefore, will you love her, honor and keep her, and be faithful to her, so long as you both shall live?

With God's help, I will.

To the wife:

(Name), you have taken this man to be your lawful husband. Since you wish to declare before God your desire that your married life should be according to God's will, I ask you, therefore, will you love him, honor and keep him, and be faithful to him, so long as you both shall live?

With God's help, I will.

The husband and wife extend their left hands:

the minister places his or her hand upon the ring(s):

Bless, O Lord, the wearing of these rings (this ring) to be symbols (a symbol) of the vows by which this man and this woman have bound themselves to each other, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

or

Grant, Lord, that they who have exchanged rings may be ever faithful to one another, and continue in love, as long as they both shall live, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The minister, holding the couple's joined right hands may say:

Those whom God has joined together,
Let no one separate.

or

(Name) and *(name),* you are husband and wife according to the witness of the Christ's universal church. Help each other. Be united. Live in peace. The God of love and peace be with you.

The rite may conclude with any of the three options found in A Service of Christian Marriage, *the dismissal with blessing, and the peace.*

VI. ANNIVERSARIES OF MARRIAGE

The celebration of marriage anniversaries and rites for renewal of wedding vows are becoming widespread in many Christian churches. They present a special opportunity to make a public witness to God's good news in the community of the faithful.

From time immemorial, families have come together for wedding anniversaries to feast, to reminisce, and to glory in their children. Often, they would ask their pastor (or the minister who witnessed their marriage) to attend the festivities, to say a grace or blessing, or to celebrate Holy Communion, and to join in the recollections and expectations. These were largely private parties held away from the church premises. The minister might offer a special anniversary prayer of thanksgiving for particular couples and families in the regular Sunday service or at the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

At a time in our society when divorces are sharply climbing, when millions of children are experiencing the trauma of broken homes, and when hundreds of thousands of couples are choosing to cohabit outside of a marriage contract or covenant; the church has a

particular need and obligation to proclaim publicly and frequently the joys and blessings of Christian marriage.

One of the results of increased awareness of the need for marriage renewal has been requests to celebrate renewals and anniversaries in the churches.

These events are highly personal, and a fixed liturgical order for them would not be likely to suit the uniqueness of the occasion.

On or near a wedding anniversary, it is always appropriate for a minister or members of the family to offer special prayers of intercession and thanksgiving in the Sunday service. The couple(s) and families may be invited to the front of the church or to stand in the congregation. The family may wish to make a special offering to commemorate the anniversary, such as flowers at the altar or other gifts to the church.

The minister may choose certain Sundays in the year to celebrate all wedding anniversaries in the church, and to deliver a sermon on the good news and grace of Christian marriage. See those Sundays in the Alternate Lectionary *(Word and Table)* with readings on the holy family, wedding in Cana, and Pauline and Johannine passages on love, marriage, and the church. For suggested wedding Scriptures, see suggestions in the commentary.

ANNIVERSARY PRAYERS[34]

A. General Anniversary

Prayer:

God of our years,
you created man and woman
to love each other
in the bond of marriage.
Bless and strengthen *(name)* and*(name)*.

May their marriage become an increasingly more perfect sign of the union between Christ and his Church
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Prayer after Communion:
Lord, you give us food and drink from heaven.
Bless *(name)* and *(name)* on their anniversary.
Let their love grow stronger
that they may find within themselves
a greater peace and joy.
Bless their home
that all who come to it in need
may find in it an example of goodness
and a source of comfort.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

B. 25th Anniversary

Prayer:
Lord of Life,
you have blessed and sustained *(name)* and *(name)* in the bond of marriage.
Continue to increase their love
throughout the joys and sorrows of life,
and help them to grow in holiness all their days.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Prayer after Communion:

Eternal God,
you bring *(name)* and *(name)* (and
their children and friends) together
at the table of your family.
Help them grow in love and unity,
that they may rejoice together
in the wedding feast of heaven.
Grant this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

C. 50th Anniversary

Prayer:

Lord our God,
bless *(name)* and *(name)*.
We thank you for their long
and happy marriage,
[for the children they have
brought into the world,]
and for all the good they have done.
As you blessed the love of their youth,
continue to bless their life together
with gifts of peace and joy.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the
Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Prayer after Communion:

Lord,
as we gather at the table of your Son,
bless *(name)* and *(name)*
on their wedding anniversary
Watch over them in the coming years,
and bring them to the feast of eternal life.
Grant this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

VII. RENEWAL OF WEDDING VOWS

Couples may choose to renew their wedding promises upon the occasion of their anniversary. The renewal, as with the Christian marriage, should be witnessed in a public service, in the community of the faithful.

Some couples may choose a public renewal of vows after an informal or legal separation. A renewal of vows is, of course, not sufficient for a divorced couple remarrying each other.

The renewal of vows may be celebrated at a Sunday service as a response to the Word, especially when the Scriptures and sermon deal with the subject of Christian marriage. Several couples may choose to renew their promises at the same service. In that instance, it may be desirable to have a printed text for the couples and congregation.

A. SUGGESTED ORDER FOR RENEWAL OF VOWS AS RESPONSE TO THE WORD IN THE SUNDAY SERVICE

1. Invitation to Renewal
2. Renewal of Vows

3. Congregational Response
4. Prayer of Thanksgiving
   (or the Great Thanksgiving at Communion)

The renewal of vows may be spoken extemporaneously by the couple(s). As in the service of marriage, the couple should be facing each other and speaking to one another.

The renewal of vows may be a public act of worship in its own right, and at a time other than the regular services of the church. The renewal rite may or may not include Communion or an agapé meal. The participating couple(s) and families should always be invited to develop the order and text of the service with the music director and minister(s). A printed bulletin enables maximum participation.

B. SUGGESTED ORDER FOR RENEWAL OF VOWS AS A SEPARATE SERVICE

1. Prelude or Other Music
2. Processional Hymn ("Now Thank We All Our God")
3. Greeting (minister, member of family or congregation)
4. Scripture Lesson(s) and Praise
5. Homily or Sermon on the Marriage Relationship
6. Renewal of Vows by Couple(s)
7. Congregational Response
8. Intercessions (Prayer for Renewal)
9. The Declaration of Renewal
10. The Peace
11. Prayer of Thanksgiving (or Holy Communion)

12. Dismissal with Blessing
13. Recessional Hymn

When the renewal of vows is a separate service, the occasion may be gladdened with a banquet, party, or picnic to which friends and family bring food, gifts, and other signs of Christian love.

VIII. SUGGESTED MUSICAL GUIDELINES

The choice of music is important, and first consideration should be given to the various styles of wedding service that can be complemented and expressed by musical resources. The variety and possibilities of services have been described elsewhere in this material. Consideration must also be given to the physical setting of the service. Where will the service take place—in a sanctuary, a chapel, or in a woods? A garden setting might use music written for guitar or music in the folk idiom. Further, those services held in other outdoor settings will dictate by way of their unique physical setting appropriate guidelines for the choice of music.

After the consideration of the service and/or the setting, one must then turn to consider the taste and the desires of the couple. Music ought to have some meaning for those who are more personally involved in the service. Too often this is forgotten; and churches, while needing to make rules and regulations of general import, must always remember that there will be circumstances in which usual guidelines will need to be stretched to accommodate specific and very personal needs.

A Service of Christian Marriage, as *worship*, assumes congregational participation; and, therefore, the tastes and repertory of the congregation must also be considered along with the couple's desires.

It is recommended that the organist (and other musicians), together with the couple, choose the music. While it may be considered by some too time consuming, it is suggested that, either through prerecorded reference recordings or actually playing or singing the music, the couple be assisted in selecting the music which will be appropriate for the wedding service. Further, when choosing music, the question needs to be raised as to the instrument that will be used to perform the music. What are the limitations of the instrument? Is it suitable for performing the desired music? Perhaps an instrument can be installed temporarily in the sanctuary if the existing instrument is not suitable for the repertoire that has been selected.

Along with the consideration of the quality of the instrument, one should consider the performing ability of the musician or musicians. Poorly performed music, however appropriate, is obviously unacceptable for this or indeed other worship services.

When choosing vocal music in services of Christian marriage, one is usually on safe ground when the text is taken from the Bible or from *The Book of Hymns*. There are other texts set in folk or in other styles. There is increasing use of choral (choir) music in services of Christian marriage. Congregational singing in the service is highly recommended, and *The Book of Hymns* offers a wealth of possibilities in this regard.

The use of music written especially for the church

is encouraged. It insures the proclamation of the faith and hope of the Christian people. Such texts and music express the joy, praise, and thanksgiving that characterize marriage in a Christian context.

A list of music suitable for a Service of Christian Marriage may be obtained by writing to Office of the Arts, Section on Worship, PO Box 840, Nashville, TN 37202.

NOTES

1. *The Book of Worship* (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1965), pp. 28-31.
2. Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Watts and Wesley to Maurice, 1690–1850* Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 137.
3. *A Report by the Liturgical Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England*, "The Wedding Service" (London: SPCK [Central Board of Finance, Church of England],1975), p. 5
4. *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London, 1960 reprint), Introduction by E.C.S. Gibson.
5. *Spiritual Director's Manual*, (Dallas: National Secretariat of the Cursillo Movement, 1976), p. 86.
6. *Prayer Books of Edward VI; Report of Liturgical Commission.*
7. *Spiritual Director's Manual.*
8. John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth (Oxford University Press, 1970).*
9. See Paul W. Hoon, "The Order for the Service of Marriage" in *Companion to the Book of Worship*, ed. W. F. Dunkle, Jr. and J. D. Quillian, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970). Entries in "Marriage" in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. N. S. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford University Press, 1972).
10. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951).
11. *Report of Liturgical Commission*, p. 6.
12. "Naming" in *Ritual in a New Day: An Invitation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976).
13. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 1976, Pars. 71. C; 453.2.*c; et al.* See P. H. Biddle, Jr., *Abingdon Marriage Manual* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), pp. 209-38.

14. Some traditional marriage rites open with a charge to the couple. A charge can be used in place of a homily or sermon. See Greetings and Charges in chapter 4.
15. The declaration of intention to be married may be omitted in the public service. However, the vows of consent, i.e., the marriage vows themselves, are the essence of the rite.
16. *The Marriage Service,* prepared by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship for provisional use (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972).
17. See Response of Families and Children in chapter 4.
18. For ecumenical translation of the classical creeds, see *Word and Table, A Basic Pattern of Sunday Worship for United Methodists,* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 70-72.
19. See Greetings and Charges in chapter 4.
20. *Ritual in a New Day,* pp. 37-52.
21. *Book of Worship,* p. 31.
22. Other outlines and resources for the agapé meal are found in *The Worshipbook,* Presbyterian (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1972); *Companion to the Book of Worship* and *Book of Worship.*
23. Taken from The Wedding Service, *Report by the Liturgical Commission.*
24. Adapted from The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage in *Book of Common Prayer (Proposed),* copyright Charles Mortimer, Custodian, Standard Book of Common Prayer.
25. The Marriage Service in *The Methodist Service Book* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1975; the Methodist Church in the United Kingdom).
26. Form for Marriage, used by permission of the Board of Publication of the Christian Reformed Church. *Reports of the Standing Committees.* Grand Rapids, 1977, p. 218.
27. Adapted from Alternate Wedding Promises in *The Marriage Service,* Lutheran.
28. Sharon and Tom Neufer Emswiler, co-directors The Wesley Foundation Campus Ministry at Illinois State University.
29. Adapted from *The Marriage Service,* Lutheran.
30. Taken from The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, *Book of Common Prayer (Proposed),* pp. 429-30.
31. Taken from The Marriage Service in *The Worshipbook,* Presbyterian.
32. Adapted from the *Marriage Rite,* Roman Catholic.
33. Portions of this Service of Recognition have been adapted from *The Methodist Service Book; The Worshipbook;* and *Book of Common Prayer (Proposed).*
34. Adapted from the *Sacramentary,* Roman Catholic.

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